

Intro:	00:04	This is Force for Hire, a deep dive into private military contracting and how it's transforming the battlefield. I'm Michelle Harven and I'm Desmon Farris. Today we have a very special guest. You may know him from his famous inspirational speech he gave to his troops before the invasion of Iraq in 2013
Speech:	00:24	We go to liberate not to conquer. We will not fly our flags in their country. We are entering Iraq to free a people and the only flag which will be flown in that ancient land is their own. Show respect for them. There are some who are alive at this moment who will not be alive shortly.
Speech:	00:52	Those who do not wish to go on that journey, we will not send. The others I expect to rock their world, wipe them out if that is what they choose. But if you are ferocious in battle, remember to be magnanimous in victory. Iraq is steeped in history. It is the site of the Garden of Eden of the great flood and the birthplace of Abraham. Tread lightly there.
Desmon Farris:	01:41	Colonel Tim Collins is a retired British military officer. He served in the army for 22 years. In 2001 he went on to command the first battalion of the Royal Irish regiment. His speech lives on in history and was even said to have hung in the Oval Office at one point. After his military career, Collins went into the private security sector. We talked with him about making a career out of his experience on the battlefield and what he makes of the contracting world.
Tim Collins:	02:07	Yeah. My name is Tim Collins. I'm a retired colonel in the British army. I spent about half of my career with our special forces, the Special Air Service and the rest of the time either on this staff or leading my regiment, which was the Royal Irish regiment. I come from Ireland and suited my soldiers.
Michelle Harven:	02:24	And so you were chairman of Pinpoint Corporate Services and now co-founder of New Century Consulting?
Tim Collins:	02:31	That's correct.
Michelle Harven:	02:33	And so what are your roles in, in these companies?
Tim Collins:	02:36	Well, to a great extent, I'm the front facing piece. I don't get involved in any of the finance or the planning or anything of that sort in the business side. Really. I'm very much focused on the customer and the capabilities and looking at how we can meet the needs of customers.

Michelle Harven: [02:51](#) And so what kind of customers do you have?

Tim Collins: [02:54](#) Many governments, um, U.S. Government is one of our biggest customers, but we've worked with customers and the Far Eastern on behalf of the U.S. government, worked in North Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq, and we've worked in southern Africa. We've worked in a number of places, places where government have specific high end needs, many have to do with special forces or sensitive intelligence gathering.

Michelle Harven: [03:15](#) How did you make the transition from army to private sector?

Tim Collins: [03:19](#) Well, it was almost accidental of guests. When I was leaving the army, I was asked by a chap called Tim Spicer who worked for a company called ages to help them set up a contract with the U.S. corps of Engineers to protect them. And I help set that contract up, helping them procure vehicles and procure weapons from the U.S. and insurance policies for the people deploying and also recruit the right people, the right quality. Because what we'd sit and gone wrong going wrong across the security industry in 2003 through to about 2007 was it expanded so rapidly. Some thoroughly unsuitable people were coming through the net and we were determined that wouldn't happen. So I did that job literally as just as I left the army and then I sort of set off to go and write a book, which, um, and there's only really in 2006 that folks in the Pentagon, uh, who I knew were saying asking me off the record because they were frustrated the answers that we're getting from the British military as to what was it in Northern Ireland specifically give them the capability. And it was that specific question that led to the company, which I find.

Michelle Harven: [04:24](#) And so can you kind of go into what was happening in Ireland that led you to the strategy that you had?

Tim Collins: [04:32](#) Well, historically, and it's been for political reasons. It's being obscured because of the so called peace process. But in reality, peace in Ireland came about because the republican movement, it's an organization called Sinn Féin, which means ourselves alone and an English, um, which, um, is a, uh, a sort of nationalist socialist or sort of Fascist party and has a military wing, the Provisional IRA. Um, and they, they were, uh, the main protagonist. Those are the people who were fighting against the British state. Uh, and the majority of people who lived in Northern Ireland against the democratic system, they wanted to by force of arms change the status of Northern Ireland. That war ended because approximately one in three members of Sinn Féin or the, um, the IRA became special branch agents, special branches, is a almost uniquely British

manifestation of policing. And the job of special branch is to recruit individuals who are members or associates of subversive organizations and to run them as informants and active members of those organizations in order to steer it to their will.

Tim Collins: [05:40](#)

And that's, um, what brought it brought about the peace process in Ireland and some individuals in the U.S. Marine Corps intelligence activity. MCIA Down in Quantico looked at police, British police, special branch, not just in Northern Ireland, but Malaya in the Cypress campaign, in the Kenyan campaign and across a deed historically and, uh, wanted to create a special branch for Iraq. And that's where we came in. At that point there was no police special branch because it'd be disbanded as part of the peace process in Northern Ireland. And what I was able to do was get recently retired rollouts. It can start with the Special Branch and guys from the Republic of Ireland's police force, which is called [inaudible] Special Branch. And they deployed to Iraq with linguists and help the Iraqi set up their own special branch. And that's essentially the beginning of the company.

Tim Collins: [06:32](#)

Wow. And so was this with the u s

Tim Collins: [06:36](#)

totally sponsored about stage by the U.S. Marine Corps. And the focus at the time was Anbar province and an Anbar province. We started off with a it mentoring teams, but initially we had only four Iraqi detectives. Um, and that was in January, 2007 by September, 2007, there was 400 Iraqi police detectives working across Anbar Province, um, as an infiltrated Ansell sooner and al Qaeda in Iraq amongst others, the pairs of organizations and run hundreds of agents and informants within those organizations, saved hundreds of American lives and hundreds of them if not thousands of Iraqi lives.

Michelle Harven: [07:14](#)

Were you working with any retired Irish, um, special forces for this process or was this mainly Iraqi?

Tim Collins: [07:24](#)

No, really how it worked would you, you would have retired police, ares, police, special branch, subject matter experts as we call them. And there would be coupled with a, what we call accredited cultural advisor. That's a mouthful. But what accredited means they were UK secret cleared or NATO. They should sound the u s secret cleared. And as a cultural advisor, it meant they were born in that case in Iraq. Uh, they probably had, they had to speak English spoken and written to high standard, obviously that the speak speak Arabic to very high standard written, unspoken and we like them to speak Kurdish, written, unspoken, both dialects of Kurdish. So these were very

clever guys who would advise the subject matter experts and then their turn would recruit and mentor members of the Iraqi police special branch. But ultimately it was the Iraqis country and it was their job and they were the people who dealt with the terrorists. We weren't allowed to even be in the same room as them. So we were very much an overwatch and mentoring and training role. We couldn't take part in any operations because of the law. And we were strictly supervised by the U.S. Marine Corps to do that.

Tim Collins: [08:27](#) Oh, and you said this, this actually turned out pretty successful.

Tim Collins: [08:33](#) Well, it was so successful by the September that Gen. Petraeus who commanded troops and the American troops and coalition troops in Iraq had the program expanded across a number of other provinces, including as a holiday in the Diyala province and Baghdad north and to the whole province. And a couple of other of the Iraqi provinces where U.S. troops were based. Predominately around Kirkuk, Mosul Tikrit, and elsewhere as well as in Baghdad. And at that stage of the Iraqi police, special branch were running a large number of terrorists, including one of the Amiras who helped select the leadership of al Qaeda in Iraq.

Michelle Harven: [09:12](#) And so you were sort of overseeing this. Yes. And so when did you actually put like a company name on this or were you just sort of working with the U.S. government for a while until you made this a company?

Tim Collins: [09:27](#) Well, what happened was it in 2007 having worked with some elements within the Pentagon on the special operations, low intensity conflict, we went to Iraq and did what the Americans, you would call it a PDSS a predeployment site survey. And the August of that year, the department that we were working for in the u s told myself and my business partner to form our own company that we would be required to deploy people by January and that we would be doing it alone, but there would be an American prime in charge of us. And so that's why we set up the company at a rapid rate. I think it was founded in October of 2007

Michelle Harven: [10:03](#) Your process working with sort of in this conflict area has changed a little bit. Your role has changed. Did you feel like you were less effective, more effective or just different?

Tim Collins: [10:13](#) We probably felt we were more effective and we were also different for a number of reasons. First of all, the u s military contracted this because the u s doesn't have us because of your

constitution and subject matter experts. They retired policeman from the constabulary from [inaudible] in the Republic of Ireland where people who had spent their lives fighting probably the most sophisticated terrorist organization in the world. So there's very little they hadn't seen before. So that was a big advantage to start with. And secondly, one of the anomalies of United States law is that the United States military serving military count unit kit classified information to third party nationals, other countries without clearance from Congress. And that would take years to do whereas, and by employing us, we could use our doctrine which had been cleared by the U.S. Department of Justice and train these guys very rapidly and get them effective without having to ask anybody.

Tim Collins: [11:07](#)

When we come back, Col. Tim Collins explains what he's doing now and what he thinks of the stigma on private contracting.

Speaker 6: [11:15](#)

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Michelle Harven: [12:02](#)

What are you doing now with your companies? The conflict has sort of shifted a bit. It keeps evolving. So what is your role now within these conflict areas?

Tim Collins: [12:13](#)

Well, there great extent. W we've changed in them the company to pinpoint. And the reason for that is it's not a UK best company and that the reason for that is where we're going after work now, which is many UK government work under what we call conflict stabilization and security fund, CSSF in order to bid for those contracts, you've got a British company and bond large. What we're looking at doing now is things, um, like advising countries. I mean, I, um, I wouldn't want to name those specific countries because that's unfair, but countries that have a recent, uh, bad experiences of terrorism and haven't got their intelligence sector together. Um, many Commonwealth countries, including Caribbean countries and countries in Southeast Asia, but also some Latin American countries that are transitioning from conflict experience. And I, I mean, I could say

Peru and Columbia who are going from conflict policing and military to consensual policing with a more conventional military, but at the same time having to face narco trafficking. Um, and we advise them, we provide subject matter experts to help them navigate that difficult transition.

Michelle Harven: [13:24](#)

And so what does conflict stabilization mean? What does that entail?

Tim Collins: [13:28](#)

Conflict Stabilization security funds, the British government's way of helping former Commonwealth countries too who are coming out of conflict to create consensual police forces but also have the capability to stabilize the situation, post-conflict and reintegrate fighters and things like that.

Michelle Harven: [13:47](#)

You're using this term consensual policing. What does that mean?

Tim Collins: [13:51](#)

Well, consensual policing really. So you imagine than somewhere like Columbia or in a country that has first years of a guerrilla warfare and then it comes a peace agreement and not at that stage that the terrorists disband and try to reintegrate into society, but the police force has to change ship. So a police force that's probably quite large and heavily on is looking at becoming more like a community police force. Um, very low visibility of weapons. Um, cooperation with the public, um, really fairs to first of the public going into the neighborhoods, the barriers, the, um, the various Philadelphia's in order to, to route the enact with the, the people themselves as opposed to being, um, a, a more militaristic stunts,

Michelle Harven: [14:38](#)

Ah, so consensual within their community. And with what you can talk about, what has been your toughest job so far of working as a contractor?

Tim Collins: [14:49](#)

One of the operations we did on again and of the u s government was assisting the Iraqis with their information operations during the siege of Mosul because that was a two way facing, um, three way in some regards. So for the, the audiences would be members of the Islamic state and people who lived in the occupied areas or areas occupied by the Islamic state who were inclined to support the Islamic state. So, uh, helping Iraqis message them. Then there was helping the Iraqis, a message, their own people, the people who had fled from the Islamic state who were living in refugee camps. Many of the 2 million people who fled from Mosul were under the impression that once Mosul was liberated, they could go home. But of course Mosul has been flattened. It's a dangerous place. It has

to be de-mined and explosives removed before the rebuilding can even happen. And that's managing that expectation with those people, the Iraqis needed to do.

Michelle Harven: [15:40](#)

Sounds like it was a lot of a communication problem.

Tim Collins: [15:42](#)

Yeah. Well, I mean it's a communication problem, but also you, uh, it's frustrating to see the work you've done to build things up, being knocked over. So when U.S., President Obama, announced we're leaving, um, Iraq, um, the, some of the elements within Iraq and the external influences, particularly from Iran started to move in. And essentially what they did was they dismantle the police Special Branch that we'd build. Um, as a result of that, um, in 2014, they were assailed by a, um, a new phenomenon, Islamic state, that conquered a large part of Iraq.

Michelle Harven: [16:20](#)

It does seem that you became sort of disillusioned with the Iraqi campaign or, or frustrated with it. Did that at all lead to you going into the contracting side?

Tim Collins: [16:30](#)

Leaving the army was entirely to do with, um, the British army losing its moral compass and its set of, uh, its outlook. The British army had essentially find itself involved in Iraq war and none of the politicians or leadership at any idea what they were trying to achieve or by when, and Seneca who in the Roman Times 2000 over 2000 years ago said, it's pointless having armies deployed in the field if there's no prudent council at home. Well, there was no prudent council at home and that's why I left the army. I couldn't be part of an organization, didn't really know what it was doing.

Michelle Harven: [17:03](#)

Okay. But so you sort of did then continue working in Iraq, but working for yourself?

Tim Collins: [17:12](#)

Well working for myself and my company, but yeah. Um, it was, um, but also working closely with the United States who had a good idea of what they were trying to achieve and that was much more satisfying. So it was a question of building things.

Michelle Harven: [17:25](#)

You've given your life to conflict and, and being there and, and building, you know, working in conflict areas. What are you passionate about now after sort of a life in it? What keeps you going in this industry?

Tim Collins: [17:43](#)

Well, I mean, I do see progress coming along, you know, in various countries and you see some conflicts coming to there and conflicts have existed throughout my service. When I joined

the British army at the height of the Cold War and, uh, 1981 when, um, on the station in Berlin when the threat was from the Soviet Union, um, and many respects when the Soviet Union went away, the threat to stability and peace got worse because chaotic forces including militant Islam changed everything.

Michelle Harven: [18:16](#)

And so what do you think from your vantage point, are some of the biggest misconceptions about private military contracting?

Tim Collins: [18:23](#)

Well, I think that the, the, the word I hear used a lot specially here in Europe is mercenaries. And, um, the reality is of course that there is private military companies that exist that are mercenaries. But none that I'm aware of are actually best in the West as the United States and United Kingdom, Australia or indeed Europe. Um, and that misconception I think is damaging, um, in some respects. But as you say there, there are, um, some countries like Russia, um, like around, um, actually recruit private individuals to actually fight on their behalf. That doesn't happen in the West. And that leads onto the other aspect of course is that private military companies, um, are there to provide services to the military and police of nation states services they don't have at their fingertips. That would cost too much to develop on their own. That's what they do. Uh, unless of course say you come from Iran or Russia, in which case you, you, you have a different intent. But the point is that the legitimate companies, the ones that worked for, um, democratic governments are heavily regulated and self regulated and they need to be an order to survive.

Michelle Harven: [19:32](#)

Why do you think contractors get a bad reputation? I mean, they've had sort of a bad reputation for a while. It hasn't really changed. Why do you think that is?

Tim Collins: [19:44](#)

Well, I mean there's a, there's a number of, uh, reasons that that is not, could be, I think that, um, the war in Iraq and following on from the Afghanistan invasion, um, the numbers of contractors in the field, uh, rules very quickly, initially a, a large number of these people who are recently retired from special forces and high end units and they were pretty much ready, ready to go into the field, self regulate. They was sensible people who knew what they're doing.

Michelle Harven: [20:13](#)

Okay.

Tim Collins: [20:14](#)

But there came a time when everyone ran out of those, those high co at high end individuals and, and people have less and less capabilities. Um, became employed at the point where this people who shouldn't really have been out there under normal

circumstances and they were there simply because there was nobody left. And shame on those contractors for contracting those people because these were in fear of products to put them in the field and, and shame on the system for not spotting that. Um, but what happens in a, inevitably, when you have people who are not suitable for the job to which they've been sent, then that's when things start going wrong. What people who've pulled the trigger needlessly on Iraqi civilians for it, for instance. Um, when you look at their background and their history, these are people really who you would normally want working for your company. Normally you would weed them out and you've got to ask yourself where it was done. Management oversight, when these people were employed, recruited and allowed to deploy

Michelle Harven: [21:12](#)

And do you think oversight has gotten better?

Tim Collins: [21:16](#)

It's getting better. Um, but I think that, um, it would be better not to have contractors in the field and to have the wrong contractors. So the hose, the government not to just dangle a person's money in front of the contractors and for some people said anything yes. For that, we'll, we'll, we'll get you people they have to regulate too and understand sometimes the capability isn't available and it's better not to have the capability than have a flawed capability in my opinion.

Michelle Harven: [21:42](#)

And is there anything else that you would want people to know? Uh, from yourself as sort of a, a leader in this space?

Tim Collins: [21:49](#)

Well, I think that, um, what I'd want to know is that US leads the world in terms of using private military companies. And I think that European countries could do well to look at the American example and take a leaf out of their book. And we see a lot of European countries that want to do things with their conscript military, which their conscript military is just not able to do. So they're not really helping the situation, whether it be assisting in refugees or a nettle missions overseas. And they would do well to look at what the American approaches and maybe, um, used contractors to do things that they simply can't do, sort of recognize the things they can do and get somebody who can do it. Not only do it, but do it well.

Michelle Harven: [22:32](#)

Okay.

Michelle Harven: [22:33](#)

We want to give a huge thank you to Col. Tim Collins for speaking with us. In the next episode, we're going to dig into the wild state of Russian military contracting and how they're making their way into Africa.

Teaser:	22:47	One of the main reasons is that they don't exist on paper. So officially they don't exist, and this grants, the Russian side a sort of a so-called plausible deniability soul, or they can send those people to work in Ukraine, Syria, in the Middle East, in Africa, but there is zero accountability for their actions.
Desmon Farris:	23:11	Don't forget to subscribe and while you're there, leave us a review. You can also let us know your thoughts at podcast@stripes.com . Also, follow us on Twitter for updates @starsandstripes
Michelle Harven:	23:22	Force for Hire's supervising editors are Bob Reid and Terry Leonard. Digital Team lead and editor is Michael Darnell.
Outro:	23:29	Thanks for listening. This is Force for Hire.